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Testimony before Appropriations Committee's Higher Education Subcommittee
Subject: Funding of public higher education

Honorable members of the committee:

I am Louise Williams, a professor of History at Central Connecticut State University for the past 19 years, and a resident of Canton, Connecticut.

I come to you today to urge you not to approve the draconian cuts to public higher education contained in Governor Malloy's budget of February 2017. These cuts will make it impossible to provide quality public higher education for the citizens of Connecticut. Quality public higher education is essential for the well-being of individuals and for the economy as a whole.

Experts have proven that individuals with college degrees earn higher incomes, are healthier, happier, and live longer than those with only a high school education.¹ Public higher education is essential so that all the citizens of Connecticut can have these advantages, not just those who are wealthy enough to pay for private higher education.

Experts also have proven that the state itself benefits economically from a population that has advanced degrees. People who have attended college pay more in taxes and require less social services than those with only a high school education.² It is also well known that a strong system of higher education makes the state more attractive to businesses.³ Public higher education, therefore, increases state revenue and decreases state spending, and attracts business opportunities to the state with no additional effort on the part of legislators.

Connecticut's public higher education system, as it stands now, is excellent. It provides educational options that suit the needs of a wide variety of students from community colleges, to the CSU system in which I work, to UConn. I have students who have begun at a community college, finished their BA at CCSU, and are moving on to Law School at UConn. Students benefit from reasonable class sizes, a great deal of personal attention both in and outside the classroom, and faculty who are excellent teachers and scholars. Given the current quality of education offered in the CSU system in particular, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of students quickly find jobs and contribute economically to our state. In fact, just two years ago 75% of CSU graduates were employed in Connecticut within 9 months after graduation.⁴

But public higher education has been cut significantly over the past two decades. In fact, state funding fell 28% per full-time equivalent (FTE) student from 2000-2014.⁵ As it is now, the state contributed only 30% of the revenue of public higher education institutions.⁶

Further cuts cannot be made without affecting the quality of the education we can provide. I have heard many suggestions for how institutions of higher education can make due with less funding: from expanding online education, to increasing the number of cheaper, part-time faculty teaching on a campus. But as it stands now, over 73% of the instructional staff in Connecticut

public higher education are part-time.⁷ There does not seem much room for expansion here. But what is even more important to note is that cutting instructional costs in these ways will seriously affect the quality of education our students will receive. Students who are taught by overworked, underpaid, part-time faculty - or placed in front of a computer to teach themselves - cannot possibly get the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the current economy. This also will put them at a disadvantage when compared to students who attend private universities that do not use such cost-cutting measures. These cuts to higher education will mean the vast majority of Connecticut citizens will receive a second-class education. The result will be a two-tiered system of higher education that benefits those who are already at an advantage.

I would like to share some of my experiences teaching at CCSU and how, with the current level of funding, I am able to provide what is truly quality public higher education. I urge you not to take this ability away with ill-considered budget cuts.

I am a full-time, tenured professor with 19 years of experience teaching at CCSU. Because I have a full-time job and tenure, and teach at a university that has reasonable class sizes, I can do so much more for my students than a computer can do and more than most part-time professors are able.

My job gives me the ability to stay in contact with students and help them for years after they have graduated. They know how to find me because I do not move from job to job. In the past month, for example, two former students emailed me to ask that I share some material they remembered me using in courses they took five, even ten years ago. Both are teachers – one in secondary school, the other as a professor at another university. At a fundraising event, I caught up with two other former students who pursued Master's degrees, but were confused about what to do next. I was able to give them some advice and suggestions.

I also help students with non-academic problems that might impact their education and careers. One student's father died unexpectedly at the age of fifty – I was there to help him cope with it, and to make up for coursework he missed. Another student had a car accident because of a medical condition that I share with her. I am able to give her advice, from my own personal experiences, about how to best deal with this condition, and she has been following up with me regularly to tell me of her progress.

Finishing college and pursuing a career involves much more than just a classroom experience. I am hardly unusual as a faculty member in that I pay attention to the whole experience of my students. Cutting funding to my university will mean that there are fewer faculty who have the time to do this, as they must work in two, three, or even four different jobs and campuses.

As a full-time, tenured professor I also am able to take risks and innovate in the classes I teach. This semester one of my courses on the history of Ireland includes an eight-day trip to that country over spring break. I have done this for years. Just this month two former students who took the trip and who pursued graduate degrees after the trip told me again how it changed their lives completely. Most students who go abroad with me have never left our country, a few have never flown in airplane. I would not have the time to do this if I were a part-time faculty member. I would not have the courage to do it if I did not have tenure. A computer cannot show students a world they never knew about first hand. In the new global economy, this sort of opportunity to study abroad is crucial. Cutting funding for higher education cuts off this option for our young people.

As a full-time, tenured professor I also can innovate pedagogically, and take the risk of making students step out of their comfort zones to look at a subject matter in new or more thoughtful ways. In another course this semester I use a new teaching technique in which students participate in complex, role-playing games set in the past. In my class, students live through the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, and are required to run the government or economy of the past. In these games, students learn skills that all employers want – they are required to construct strong arguments based on complex ideas and supported with relevant data. They give speeches to persuade others to support their opinions. They think critically, they debate, they work in teams, and they strategize. And then they write up their ideas clearly and persuasively. This sort of teaching method cannot be done by computer. It can only work if a faculty member can be in the classroom to supervise and with a reasonable class size. Cuts to funding for public higher education will mean that this sort of innovative teaching will not be provided, and Connecticut employers will have a limited pool of highly skilled and astute job candidates ready to be hired for their businesses.

Another student I talked to this month shared with me that, while she will graduate this spring, she was in despair. She had job possibilities and a good career ahead of her, but the cost of attending CCSU had put her in debt to the tune of almost \$50,000. She told me she had no idea how she will pay off this debt, no matter what job she finds. This student faces years of struggle to pay off student loans all because she chose to go to college so she could have a chance at a better life and a rewarding career. Again, this is a result of past cuts to public higher education.

The latest cuts to public higher education being proposed in the Governor's budget will only make situations like hers – and many other students – worse. In the past decade, tuition has increased by 78% in the CSCU system to make up for cuts in state funding.⁸ The result is that Connecticut has the third-highest student debt in the nation and is among the five worst states for student loan affordability.⁹ This especially impacts minority and economically disadvantaged students who are the most in need of the life advantages offered by quality public higher education.

I urge you not to make the current and future young people of Connecticut suffer from a second-class education and huge debts from which they can barely recover. Quality public higher education more than pays for itself in increased tax revenue and decreased social service spending. Connecticut can afford this. Connecticut is the wealthiest state in the nation and that wealth continues to increase. In 2014, our state had the highest income per capita in the nation.¹⁰ A recent report concluded that “the income of the wealthiest 1 percent of Connecticut's residents grew by 35 percent between 2009 and 2012.”¹¹ And yet with all this wealth we spend very little on public higher education. In 2015 the state appropriated a mere 3.9% of its budget to higher education.¹² We can afford more. We certainly do not need to cut public higher education any further.

Failure to fund quality public higher education represents a political decision not to invest in the working people of Connecticut and the long-term health of the state. Connecticut's more than 100,000 college students deserve a high-quality education.¹³ The state deserves a better future made possible by leaders who commit to the long-term investment in higher education, rather than short-term austerity excuses.

NOTES

- ¹ Philip Trostel, "It's Not Just the Money; the Benefits of College Education to Individuals and to Society" (Lumina Foundation, n.d.).
- ² Philip Trostel, "The Fiscal Impacts of College Attainment" (New England Public Policy Center at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, n.d.).
- ³ Elaine Pofeldt CNBC.com special to, "6 Ways States Are Luring Small Business," *CNBC*, June 26, 2015, <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/24/6-ways-states-are-luring-small-business.html>.
- ⁴ Connecticut Higher Education Coordinating Council, "Higher Education in Connecticut, Higher Education Coordinating Council 2015 Accountability Report," 2015, 35.
- ⁵ Mark Huelsman and Robert Hiltonsmith, "Connecticut's Great Cost Shift | Demos," October 20, 2014, <http://www.demos.org/publication/connecticuts-great-cost-shift>.
- ⁶ Office of Higher Education, "2015 Connecticut Higher Education System Data and Trends Report," 2015, 21.
- ⁷ Office of Higher Education, "2015 Connecticut Higher Education System Data and Trends Report," 27.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁹ Elyssa Kirkham, "5 Best and Worst States for Paying Off Student Loan Debt," *Student Loan Hero*, November 7, 2016, <https://studentloanhero.com/featured/student-loan-affordability-state-2016/>.
- ¹⁰ Ana Radelat, "CT Continues to Lead Nation in Income, but Wealth Poorly Distributed," *The CT Mirror*, September 30, 2015, <http://ctmirror.org/2015/09/30/ct-continues-to-lead-nation-in-income-but-wealth-poorly-distributed/>.
- ¹¹ Derek Thomas, "Connecticut's Income Inequality in Stark Contrast to Its Prosperity," *CT Viewpoints*, July 15, 2016, <http://ctviewpoints.org/2016/07/15/top-one-percent-booms/>.
- ¹² Office of Fiscal Analysis, Connecticut General Assembly, "Connecticut State Budget FY 14 & FY 15 Budget," 2015, 12.
- ¹³ Research Center, "Current Term Enrollment Estimates – Spring 2016," *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*, May 23, 2016, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/currenttermenrollmentestimate-spring2016/>.